

Nixon Skipped U.S. Health Insurance



By
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Former President Nixon could have been spared most of the heavy medical costs of his recent illness if he had signed up for a health insurance policy available to all present and retired federal workers for about \$16 a month.

Instead, Mr. Nixon left the presidency with its free, round-the-clock medical benefits, which include the nation's leading specialists, without any sort of government-sponsored health plan. Now, according to his spokesman Ronald Zielger, Mr. Nixon is paying all medical, hospital and surgical costs out of pocket.

Federal officials refuse to talk about the insurance status of the former President, except to confirm that he "did not elect" coverage under any of the 41 plans underwritten by private firms and made available to more than 8 million government workers, their families and retirees.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no provision for special health care for former Presidents. Mr. Eisenhower was entitled to free health coverage because of his long military service, and Mr. Johnson's treatment at an Air Force hospital in Texas was on an emergency basis. But Mr. Johnson apparently did sign up for the federal employee health benefits program before he left office, and most of his coverage was handled by that health plan.

Although his departure from the White House is considered a resignation rather than a retirement, officials say that the President "surely" could have qualified for a government health policy based on his five years as President, his eight years as Vice President and his terms in the Senate and House. Mr. Nixon apparently did have government health insurance coverage when he was a member of Congress.

Government experts said they would not discuss specifics of Mr. Nixon's case, but they speculated that he had taken a major plan such as the Blue Cross-

Blue Shield medical package (which 6 out of 10 government workers have) the company would have paid as much as 80 cents of every dollar charged the former President for health care.

The cost of the Blue Cross-Blue Shield Plan is the same whether the covered employee is a \$5,200-a-year messenger or the President. The high-option package in that plan for covering the employee or retiree and family, costs less than \$30 a month and the "agency" of the employee or retiree would pay about half that premium. That money would have come out of Mr. Nixon's federal pension, which is about \$80,000 per year.

Blue Collar Pay Raises: D.C. government employees are automatically included in a 6.5 per cent raise that will take effect Sunday for local blue-collar (wage board) federal workers. But officials expect 6,600 D.C. workers will lose money, and that it will be active to Oct. 27.

Mayor Walter E. Riegert set aside enough money in the current budget for a blue-collar raise, but is awaiting official decisions from his staff on pay boosts. Those reductions will be made shortly.

Disability Pension: House Ways and Means committee is having a hearing about a section of the bill that would increase pay for the first time for disabled military veterans.

Veterans' complaints about the bill, which now is chaired by Rep. (Ark.) Insull, are a handful. Congress will draw benefits from the defense rather than the Administration. The odds are good that the bill will survive the next session.

On-The-Road: A feature of the Employment Security Act will permit job to their respective companies. This begins a terror of employment, presents a major problem.